



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

American Association for Public Opinion Research

Review

Reviewed Work(s): Power and Personality. by Harold Dwight Lasswell

Review by: Nathan Leites

Source: *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Autumn, 1948), pp. 517-519

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Association for Public Opinion Research

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2745365>

Accessed: 18-09-2016 02:41 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>



American Association for Public Opinion Research, Oxford University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Public Opinion Quarterly*

whose volume on Germany is also reviewed in this issue of the *Quarterly*, was one of the social scientists recruited for the community studies. A number of separate studies were made, but unfortunately the original plan for a coordinated analysis was not carried out.

DONALD V. McGRANAHAN
Roslyn Harbor, L.I.

LESSWELL, HAROLD DWIGHT
Power and Personality. New York:
W. W. Norton, 1948. 262 pp. \$3.00.

This brilliant book draws, soberly and eloquently, upon more than twenty years of the intellectual production of one of the most insightful political analysts of our time. Its appendix, by the author and Abraham Kaplan, affords a preview of a forthcoming work which will be the first attempt to construct an adequate scientific language about "power" and "influence." It is impossible in a brief review to state and discuss the full range of the propositions advanced by Dr. Lasswell. Hence, I shall with some arbitrariness single out a few points of considerable importance for current and impending research.

This book is a convincing illustration of a position which it advocates. It shows in its very texture that certain of the traditional demarcations of the human sciences—such as "sociology," "political science," "comparative history," "social psychology"—are of no primary importance in current work. It would be difficult to classify many statements in this book in some such terms. Where it can be done, one would frequently find that a *coherent* sequence of sentences would be composed

of elements subsumable under *various* conventional disciplines. What stands out, however, is the usefulness of provisionally subdividing current analyses of human affairs according to the theoretical "tools" they apply, rather than according to subject matter. In this sense two major clusters can be discerned around economic theory on the one hand and dynamic psychology on the other. While Dr. Lasswell looks forward to a future unification of these systems (p. 176), his present work is oriented towards the latter. It is "no great exaggeration to say that we have learned more about human beings in the last fifty years than in the previous history of mankind" (p. 104). It would be an equally moderate exaggeration to say that we have utilized this new knowledge less, as far as the understanding and control of political events is concerned, than we have any other body of twentieth century discoveries comparable in magnitude.

This work expresses with unusual lucidity and impact another recent trend in human science research: the accent on the "policy sciences" which "clarify the process of policy-making . . . or supply data needed for the making of rational judgments on policy questions" (p. 119). Research which wants to aid decision-making has tended to be limited in insight; basic research has not usually been explicitly related to major policy alternatives. But recently human scientists, following an established tradition in the natural sciences, have been increasingly impressed by the frequency of occurrence of a pre-established harmony, as it were, between the requirements of insight acceleration and policy clarification. It is in such a context that Dr. Lasswell

proposes that human scientists devote more of their effort to the advancement of "the policy sciences of democracy . . . for the purpose of elaborating the missing links in the chain of analysis and observation which bears most directly upon the maintenance of . . . democracy" (p. 123). In the present time of troubles in western culture "it makes sense to develop a strategy of using our limited intellectual resources for the defense and extension of our values" (p. 122). Needless to say, a selection and integration of scientific statements oriented on such criteria does not affect their "objectivity": "it is thinkable that the students of human relations have achieved a degree of self-confidence and proficiency in which 'method' and 'objectivity' can largely be taken for granted, and hence that questions of intellectual-social strategy can receive needed emphasis" (p. 122).

Power and Personality indicates some of the major lines along which impending advances in the policy sciences of democracy are apt to occur. One is the focussing on what is now coming to be tagged "the decision making process"; i.e., the study of "elites" not merely or mainly as to their career backgrounds and circulation, but rather as to the nuances of their typical feelings, calculations, behaviors in typical situations. This would permit a detailed assessment of the expediency of their operations (Dr. Lasswell illustratively discusses "impaired working ability," "alienation of support," "choice of inadequate personnel") as well as of their morality—that is, the degree of their conformity to the irreducible preferences by which we define "democracy."

An equal need for research obtains

as to the factors which foster or impede the occurrence of a highly democratic personality (supposing we have defined it with suitable specificity). After having mentioned the "social anxiety hypothesis" (pp. 161-164) and the "hypothesis of sexual-political freedom" (pp. 165-168), Dr. Lasswell points to (1) the ambiguities of their meaning, (2) the inadequacy of available evidence for or against them, and (3) the probable existence of other relevant factors and relationships. The author alludes to the variety of contents of—and interrelationships between—conscious and unconscious phantasies about intimate figures in the child's experience and about public objects in the adult's life (cf. "The growth of political images," pp. 156-159). He also indicates the variety of reactions—and of interrelations between reactions—towards such early intimate and adult public objects (cf. "Tactics in the primary circle," pp. 159-161).¹ We do not at present know sufficiently under which conditions any one of the many possibilities in this area is likely to materialize. Hence, an advance of the policy sciences of democracy requires the creation of Social Self-Observatories of Personality Formation working on a continuing World Survey of Personality Formation (p. 169): "Mankind is well accustomed to the use of observatories to provide a running account of the physical environment. . . . We need a never-ending inventory of the charac-

¹ Using his definition of a "power relation" as one "in which extreme deprivations are threatened or inflicted against a challenger," and recalling that the infant "treats every discomfort as a provocation for every form of expression at his command," Dr. Lasswell points out that "everyone is born a politician and most of us outgrow it" (p. 160).

ter-personality structure (with special reference to the requirements of democracy) of our one-year-olds, our two-year-olds, and so on up," using "proper sampling methods throughout all accessible cultures, all strata in society, and hence during all crisis and inter-crisis situations." This "will enable us to conduct experiments . . . for the sake of determining the usefulness of various methods of changing the environment with a view to aiding the formation of democratic character and personality" (p. 169).

The personality analysis sector of the policy sciences of democracy could be used by a National Personnel Assessment Board "which will select and supervise the work of . . . experts in the description of democratic and anti-democratic personality." Candidates for positions of influence might "submit voluntarily to an investigation by the board which would say only that the candidate has, or has not, met certain defined minimum standards" (p. 187). As "rational" opinion by definition "depends on access to pertinent facts and interpretations," and as "no facts are more pertinent than those pertaining to the character structure of candidates for leadership" (p. 187), the institutional proposal just mentioned appears as a required implication of democracy.

In a comprehensive discussion of the future of the current world bipolarity, Dr. Lasswell points to the possibility of a "perpetual armistice" with "ceremonies of reciprocal vilification" in a "highly garrisoned world" (p. 180). He also mentions the possibility of a return to multipolarity (p. 183). To learn more about the conditions making for or against such outcomes might be a major (and perhaps for the moment

not entirely feasible) task of human science research. The same may be said about the possibility that "despotic rulers" may "as time passes . . . permit some gradual extension of power" (p. 180); and the possibility that if one power were to establish world hegemony after a future war, the level of its expectation of violence would not substantially decrease, but rather be "transformed into a pervasive fear of assassination, sabotage, and the renewal of war from secret laboratories" (p. 215). Could, one may ask, the human sciences devise fear-alleviating arrangements for such a contingency? Could they devise practices to increase the probability that such tension-reducing arrangements would be adopted by the central policy-makers in a one-power world?

NATHAN LEITES
Yale University

OAK, VISHNU V.

The Negro Newspaper. Published by Vishnu V. Oak, Box 5, Xenia, Ohio, 1948. 170 pp. \$2.50.

The mayor of a southern town once complained to Dr. Robert R. Moton, second president of Tuskegee Institute, that his cook always attended her lodge meeting on a certain night of the week, no matter what the demands were in his home, and asked Dr. Moton to explain this "characteristic of colored people." With a twinkle in his eye, the Tuskegee president said: "Colored folks, like all other folks, have the urge to vote and otherwise participate in organized civic affairs. Since they cannot freely enjoy the privilege here in the South, their lodges provide for them the nearest approach to satisfying that urge."